

tiously, feeling the stone roof above him, and crept carefully along the corridor.

The spot of light grew larger. Cardwell emerged into a second room, much larger than the one he had left. It was filled with dust, and in the dust were footprints of a shoe with a tapering toe. Cardwell shuddered. The man who left that print must have passed that way centuries before.

No, it was a woman's footprint, for beside it were the larger ones of a man. Her guard! There was a long line in the dust beside them, evidently caused by some trailing weapon.

Cardwell followed the prints. He passed through an old oak doorway and suddenly emerged upon the an open space, tufted with grass and inclosed by high walls.

He could see the grim outlines of the Tower about him and realized that he was standing in a little disused courtway, leading upon a larger one. From this came the murmur of voices. Cardwell followed hastily, passed through a gate and stood still, horrified at what he saw.

In the center of the courtway was a grisly block. Beside it stood a headman, and, kneeling in front of it was a woman in antique dress, with long, fair hair tied back and the throat of her gown unfastened.

A dozen men in black, wearing swords at their sides, were watching the scene. The headman lifted his ax and ran his thumb along the blade.

Cardwell leaped forward so suddenly that he took the headman completely by surprise. He snatched the ax from him. The woman at the block turned her face toward him. It was very fair and quite composed.

With loud cries the spectators ran forward, unsheathing their swords. But Cardwell swung his ax so vigorously that they fell back, scowling and muttering fiercely.

"What doth this fellow here?"

cried the foremost. "Do you bear his majesty's pardon, sir?"

"Nay, my lord," said the girl at the block. "I know there can be no pardon for such as I. His majesty hath given orders to his high sheriff that I be done to death expeditiously for my part in his grace of Suffolk's conspiracy."

Cardwell sprang to her side. But now the others, who had crept upon him unawares while the girl was speaking, leaped on him from every quarter. The ax was snatched from his hand and a dozen swords were pointed at his breast.

As in a dreadful dream, Cardwell, helpless there, saw the girl lay her head down on the block again, saw the ax rise and fall. He struggled, shouted—

Then he was lying upon his bed in the cell again and the faint light of morning straggled through the slit in the wall above him.

He started up. As he did so he heard footsteps in the corridor outside. His jailer entered, accompanied by the governor of the Tower. Cardwell sprang to his feet and gave the military salute.

The governor, acknowledging it, produced a document and began to read, while Cardwell, cursing the delay for such a formality, waited until he had finished.

"Well, I'm ready if you are," he said, trying to calm himself for the inevitable.

"For what?" asked the governor.

"The little firing party?"

"I am sorry I did not make myself clearer," said the governor. "The paper that I have just read you is a reprieve from his majesty, who has commuted your sentence to that of imprisonment for life. Which means, of course that you can count on being set free after the war—that being unofficial."

Dazed, Cardwell could only stare at the other, who went on, half jocularly, to ease the strain of the situation: